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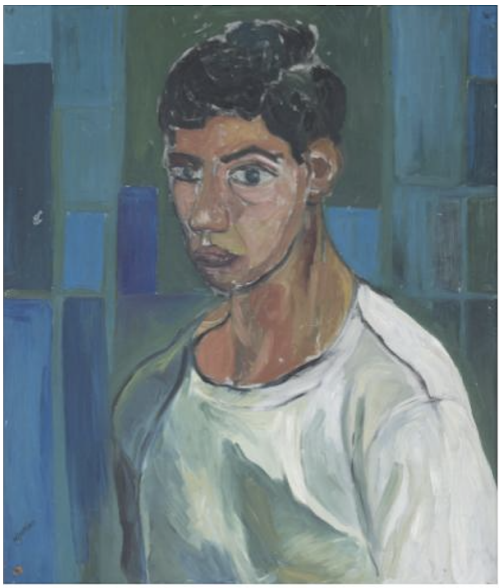

Derek Jarman, Self-portrait, 1959.

There Must Be an Alternative:

Disjointed Time & Defiant Deviance in the Films of Derek Jarman

"My body was thrown into the struggle, bringing me into a spotlight in a way I never expected or wanted. On 22 December, finding I was body positive, I set myself a target: I would disclose my secret and survive Margaret Thatcher. I did. Now I have my sights set on the millennium and a world where we are all equal before the law."
— Derek Jarman, *Dancing Ledge* [1]

"And if the vulgar and malignant crowd
Misunderstand the love with which we're blest,
Its worth is not affected in the least:
Our faith and honest love can still feel proud."
— Michelangelo, *Sonnets of Michelangelo* [2]

"If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite."
— William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* [3]

[1] Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, p. ix.
[2] Michelangelo, *Sonnets of Michelangelo*, 55. Quoted by Jarman in *At Your Own Risk*, 46.
[3] Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 21.

PREFACE

To understand Derek Jarman, look no further than his home. He spent his final years at Prospect Cottage in Dungeness, a little Victorian fisherman's hut in Kent. The space hangs off the barren edge of England, shrouded in the shadow of a nuclear power station. The garden, perhaps Jarman's most intimate work of art, is still alive today: dotted with rosemary, marigold and irises, the Earth conjured into a sculpture. The terrain was unwieldy, and difficult to cultivate; he had to pick plants that looked like they belonged in this alien place where nothing grew. He ended up creating an Eden in the midst of a vague, festering sense of the apocalyptic: equal parts due to the disease ravaging his body, AIDS, and chemical fallout from the nuclear power station next door. It was a fitting place, for though Jarman knew the end was near, he still tended to the garden, willing the land back to life.

It almost feels wrong to write an auteur study on the films of Derek Jarman. Since the man was an iconoclast, scraping his ashes together into the shape of an icon is a strange thing to do — almost antithetical to his artistic approach, which was grounded so squarely in collaboration and collectivity. He dedicated his short life to romance and rebellion: the unrelenting criticism of prevailing ideologies and idolatries, always tinged with beauty and a tangy sense of humor.

Jarman's biography and artistry are so entangled, it is impossible to understand one without knowledge of the other. At the same time, his controversial life has often overshadowed the content of his work, for reasons both positive and negative. His films deserve to be analyzed on their own terms, unclouded by hagiography or moral condemnation. One can think of the filmography as a garden, each film a sculpture or an unwieldy rhododendron, a weed or a thorn in the side of polite society. As Lars von Trier said, "a film should be like a stone in your shoe."[4] Here, we take our shoes off, shake the pebbles out, and admire the little indentations they've made.

TOPIC QUESTIONS: How did Derek Jarman use cinema to challenge rising tides of homophobia, Thatcherite neoliberalism, and conservative repression in Britain? What political purpose did his ecstatic and dystopian visions serve, and how were they reactions to Margaret Thatcher's political philosophy? How did Jarman's films subvert the "There is No Alternative" ideology, and what was the alternative that he posed? Finally, how did he tinker with time, challenging 'master narratives' by creating queer temporalities and histories?

THESIS/CORE OF ARGUMENT: Derek Jarman used cinema as a tool of political subversion during a time of Thatcherite repression. His re-interpretations of history and dystopic visions of the present, as well as his insistence on the worth and validity of queer lives, ran directly counter to the hostile, homogenizing forces of New Right Conservatism. He was able to achieve this through a radical reimagination of how time and history can be represented onscreen.

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[4] Koutsourakis, "A Film Should Be Like a Stone in Your Shoe," 1.

Throughout his wide-ranging oeuvre, Derek Jarman played the role of time-traveler, knocking time out of joint to examine the echoes between disparate eras. While he is often described as an iconoclast, contemporary criticism of his work tends to attribute that rebellious spirit to the more graphic, erotic, or provocative imagery in his films. Of course, those scraps of dissent are surprising and often challenging, but the kernel of his defiance lies in his experimental treatment of time. At the core of this thesis is the argument that Jarman's disregard for the linear timeline was his boldest iconoclasm.

The title *There Must Be an Alternative* is a reversal of Margaret Thatcher's famous adage: *There is No Alternative*, or TINA. The original slogan was meant to declare that neoliberal capitalism was not only eternal, but inevitable.[5] If there is one curdling cry that emerges from the whole of Jarman's life and work, it is that *there must be an alternative*. There must be alternative ways of living, loving, being, and thinking, divorced from the homogenizing forces of so-called 'Victorian morality.'

'Alternative" also happens to be one of the labels perpetually haunting Jarman's legacy, along with loaded adjectives like 'radical' or 'avant-garde.' The word 'camp' is also used and abused in discussions of his films.[6] These shoes fit in a pinch, but are ultimately insufficient. It would be more accurate to call him a 'Radical Traditionalist'— a contradiction in flesh, with references rooted in antiquity, and sights set on the new millennium.[7]

This thesis will focus predominantly on two of Jarman's features, each of which puts its own spin on 'the past dreamed the future present': his 1978 Elizabethan-punk film *Jubilee*, and his 1991 postmodern adaptation of *Edward II*. These two films were created on opposite ends of the Thatcher years, and taken together, they fiercely counter the political and social conservatism now referred to as Thatcherism. In many ways, the neoliberal prophecies in *Jubilee* come to fruition in *Edward II* — an indictment of the hypocrisy, greed, political opportunism, and above all, the moral bankruptcy of Thatcherite policy.

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[5] Mark Fisher also subverted TINA with the title *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* — a text which will be drawn on later in relation to Jarman's 1978 film *Jubilee*.

[6] Though camp does play a role in much of his work, the editors of *The Daily Mail* or *The Sun* seem content to describe any piece of art brought to life by limp wrists as "camp."

[7] Hoyle, "Derek Jarman: Radical Traditionalist."

Derek Jarman was born in Northwood, London in 1942 to a British mother and a New Zealander father.[8] Because of his father's career in the Royal Air Force, Derek and his sister grew up on RAF stations their entire childhood, with stints in Italy, Pakistan, and India. After a traumatizing prep school education, he enrolled at King's College London in 1960, where he studied History, English and Art.[9] He then attended the Slade School of Fine Art at University College London, specializing in painting and stage design. It was also at the Slade that he met other young creatives who would become giants of contemporary art - David Hockney and Patrick Procter.

Jarman was never supposed to be a filmmaker. First and foremost, he was a painter and a visual artist. In the late sixties, he and a group of friends took over a vast old corset factory at Bankside, where they began fooling around with Super-8 film, creating shorts and screening them at parties.[10] It was when he designed the sets for Ken Russell's baroque, blasphemous film *The Devils* in 1971, however, that he became interested in cinema as an art in and of itself.

Though Russell was a big influence, Jarman's "heavyweight soulmates" were a hodge-podge of rebels and mavericks.[11] Among their ranks were poets (Shakespeare, Whitman, Blake, Rilke, Ginsberg and Burroughs), painters (Caravaggio, Rauschenberg, Rothko), filmmakers (Pasolini, Tarkovsky, Kenneth Anger, Maya Deren), and a throng of other alchemists and vagabonds. "I began to read between the lines of history," he wrote of his young adulthood.[12] "The hunt was on for forebears who validated my existence."

Jarman's first feature *Sebastiane* was released in 1976, a reinterpretation of Saint Sebastian's life and grisly execution. It was revolutionary for its Latin dialogue and unabashed homoeroticism. Over the following years, Jarman would make films about punk (*Jubilee*), adaptations of Shakespeare (*The Tempest*, *The Angelic Conversation*), a biopic about the Baroque painter Caravaggio (perhaps his most famous film), a Brechtian tragicomedy about Ludwig Wittgenstein, and so on. The vast majority

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[8] Peake, *Derek Jarman*, 13.

[9] This part of his educational formation is often overlooked, but it provided him with a background in the humanities which would become crucial to his creative life.

[10] This tinkering yielded cinematic experiments featuring artists like Kevin Whitney, Duggie Fields and Andrew Logan. More in Adam Scovell's article for *Little White Lies*, "Beginnings: Derek Jarman's Bankside."

[11] Jarman, *At Your Own Risk*, 46.

[12] Jarman, *At Your Own Risk*, 46.

of his films were made on shoestring budgets, with occasional support from British Screen, Channel 4 or the British Film Institute.

An avid writer, Jarman published poetry, diaries, screenplays and autobiographies. He was also a lifelong activist for queer liberation and human rights, actively involved with the British gay rights organization OutRage! for many years. Diagnosed with HIV in 1986, he was one of the first public figures to be open about his status. He continued to make five more features, culminating in his final film *Blue* in 1993, comprised of a single shot of Yves Klein International Blue.[13] Jarman passed away in London in 1994—leaving behind many friends, countless paintings, hundreds of pages of writings, a garden, and a love to tend to it.[14]

The 1980s was both a marvelous and wretched time to be a British filmmaker. *Chariots of Fire*[15] swept the Oscars in 1982 (winning four Academy Awards overall), leading screenwriter Colin Welland to declare in his acceptance speech: *The British are coming!*[16] This proclamation ushered in the informal "British Renaissance." At this time, however, the Conservative government was making changes to the film industry that made it difficult for queer filmmakers like Jarman to participate, and nearly impossible for visions like his to be realized.[17]

In truth, much of the richness of this 'renaissance' came from the boom in political filmmaking in response to Thatcherism.[18] Profound anger at Britain's political situation would fuel filmmakers like Stephen Frears, Terry Gilliam, Mike Leigh, Ken Loach, Peter Greenaway and others to

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[13] This was backed by a complex soundscape: music from Simon Fisher Turner and Throbbing Gristle, quotes from Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, original poetry, and all manner of flotsam and jetsam from his creative life. The monochrome visual(s) placed over this deeply personal aural storytelling—chosen in part because he was going blind at the time—permitted him to tell a story about AIDS that wasn't exploitative or sentimental.

[14] Keith Collins a.k.a. "Hinney Beast" was Jarman's partner and caretaker during his final years. Collins also acted in films like *Edward II*, *The Garden*, and *Wittgenstein*.

[15] Jarman lambasted *Chariots of Fire* as "a damp British Triumph of the Will" in *Dancing Ledge* (p. 197). In *Kicking the Pricks*, he bemoaned the cold, corporate reality and "false imaging" of the official New British Cinema. He seemed to view many of these films as nationalist pornography, marred by soulless capitalist censorship.

[16] A sharp turn away from the idea espoused by François Truffaut that British cinema was "a contradiction in terms." theguardian.com/film/2000/oct/06/culture.features2.

[17] In 1980, the number of British feature film releases diminished to the lowest since 1914. This was largely because of cuts to the arts (for example, the elimination of the Eady Levy, which had helped subsidize British film production since the fifties). | screenonline.org.uk/film/facts/fact2.html.

[18] More information about Thatcherism's impact on British film can be found in the essay collection *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*, edited by Lester Friedman.

churn out a slew of daring, overtly political films. During the 80s, the British film industry became increasingly reliant on ancillary markets like television, with Channel 4 playing a particularly crucial role in supporting arthouse filmmakers.[19] Alternative film movements sprouted during this time, expanding the frame to fit a wider range of stories and perspectives. Notable queer films included *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), written by Hanif Kureishi and directed by Stephen Frears, which tackled both homophobia and the experience of being a first-generation Brit of Pakistani descent; *Maurice* (1987), the Merchant Ivory adaptation of E.M. Forster's novel; and Terence Davies' nostalgic trilogy about coming of age in working class Liverpool. The genesis of black film collectives (Black Audio Film Collective, Sankofa Film and Video Collective, and others), spearheaded by artists like John Akomfrah and Isaac Julien, provided a vital platform for diasporic and Black British voices. This period in British filmmaking was highly contradictory, as a diverse generation of largely art-school-educated filmmakers fought to realize their visions, equipped with more kinetic energy and less financial resources than ever.

Derek Jarman occupies a strange position in cinema history, as he doesn't quite fit any mold, his inner and public lives marked by contradictions. This makes it difficult to position him within the context of either British or queer filmmaking, as he made an art out of subverting the conventions of both.[20] He's often described as an 'avant-garde' filmmaker, but it would be more accurate to see his filmography as cleaved in two. On one side were more commercially successful or digestible features, such as *Jubilee* (1978), *Caravaggio* (1986), and *Edward II* (1991). On the other hand, he cultivated what he called a "cinema of small gestures": non-linear, experimental films that took advantage of the accessibility of super-8.

So, what precisely was Thatcherism, and how were Thatcherism and gay liberation in conflict with one another? Britain in the late seventies and eighties was in dire straits, as the post-war consensus started to crumble, and the economy fell apart. Margaret Thatcher's term as Prime Minister was precipitated by a political crisis ending in a vote of no confidence, which ousted James Callaghan's Labour government by one vote. Leader of the Conservative Party since 1975, Thatcher went on to

[19] Brooke, "Channel 4 and Film," screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1304135/index.html.
[20] Jarman's place in the "New Queer Cinema" movement is explored in chapter 5 of B. Ruby Rich's *New Queer Cinema*.

serve as Prime Minister for eleven years, from 1979 to 1990. As Roland Wymer put it, she was a leader with the minority of the country's support who seemed destined to rule forever.[21] Thatcherism can be conceptualized as a lasagna of contradictions—an ideology whose internal discrepancies were strange echoes of Jarman's own contradictions.[22] One can separate the cluster of idea(l)s now associated with Thatcherism into three main categories: rhetoric, economic agenda, and social/cultural agenda.

Thatcherite rhetoric can be summed up by one of the Iron Lady's most famous quotes: "There is no such thing as society."[23] With this and similar phrases, the British New Right established a vision of privatization, personal responsibility and individualism. Essentially, everyone is an entrepreneur selling themselves. It is the invasive 'nanny state' which has destroyed the nation—seducing lazy people into lives of sloth on the dole and allowing the government to intrude too intimately into daily life. This revulsion at the 'invasiveness' of social programs is countered, however, by the insistence that "economics are the method: the object is to change the soul."[24] Rhetoric of hands-off small government was combined with a rigorous and invasive moral agenda. The real project here is a spiritual one, a far more intimate kind of interference than any economic policy.

There is also a temporal paradox embedded in the Thatcherite worldview, one which mirrored Jarman's own internal contradictions. In both Thatcher's political life and Jarman's creative one, there was always a looming tension between old and new, antiquity and futurity, nostalgia and modernism.

Neoliberal capitalism took possession of the language of progress and modernization, presenting itself as the default framework of the future. At the same time, the Thatcherite Brave New

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[21] Wymer, *Derek Jarman*, 111.

[22] After all, Jarman was both a queer rebel and an incorrigible antiquarian, critical of nostalgia and yet hopelessly wistful.

[23] To ensure this is not being taken out of context, the rest of this quote from her 1987 *Women's Own* interview is as follows: "What is wrong with the deterioration? I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand 'I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it! ... I am homeless, the Government must house me!' and so they are casting their problems on society, and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families, and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first... There is no such thing as society. There is living tapestry of men and women and people and the beauty of that tapestry and the quality of our lives will depend upon how much each of us is prepared to take responsibility for ourselves." | margaretthatcher.org/document/106689.

[24] Rachman, Gideon. "The end of the Thatcher era." *Financial Times*, 27 April 2009, ft.com/content/98ef04fe-3357-11de-8f1b-00144feabdc0.

World was grounded in 19th-century ideas and rooted in nostalgia for the imperial days of yore.[25] The neoliberal agenda advocated economic liberalism, which for Thatcherites (and their kissing cousins, Reaganites) meant unregulated, free-market capitalism.[26,27]

In Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution, a hodge-podge of conservative social mores was cobbled together to create an ultra-restrictive moral agenda. In keeping with Thatcher's remark that "there is no such thing as society," it was presumed that it should be the church and the family that take care of social problems, *not* the government. This rendered the nuclear family — and by extension, heterosexuality — the basic foundation of a Thatcherite, non-society society. For Jarman, who deplored repression in any form, and relished the beauty of so-called "deviance," this could not stand.

The core of this exploration of Jarman's work will consist of in-depth analyses of two of his features, each film corresponding to the pillar of Thatcherism it challenged most pointedly. One prominent element of Thatcherism that Jarman targeted was neoliberalism, or what Mark Fisher referred to as 'capitalist realism.' This critique is felt most strongly through Jarman's 1978 punk prophecy, *Jubilee*. The second building block of Thatcherism his films confronted was Thatcherite morality. This worldview was emblematic of the 'Heterosoc' Jarman was dedicated to combatting: the culture of repression Conservatives were revitalizing in 1980s Britain.

At the core of this thesis is the argument that Jarman's disregard for the linear timeline was his boldest iconoclasm. Beyond reverence for any painting, historical figure, or god, he dared to be openly revisionist. The shock of historical anachronisms is a means to an end: challenging conventional temporalities and forging linkages between liberation struggles of the past and present.

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[25] In the words of Milton Friedman, "the thing that people do not recognize is that Margaret Thatcher is not in terms of belief a Tory. She is a nineteenth-century Liberal." | self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/thatcherite - Thatcherism_before_Thatcher.

[26] Classic free market neoliberalism was based on the ideas of people like Milton Friedman/Chicago School Boys and Friedrich Hayek's Mont Pellerin Society. More on the origins of neoliberalism in Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*.

[27] In Thatcher's government, this translated into aggressive measures to marginalize trade unions and centralize power from local authorities to central government. Austerity grew increasingly pervasive as the British welfare state was stripped away and public sectors were privatized.

Uncanny Neoliberal Prophecies in *Jubilee* (1978) - *"the past dreamed the future present"*

If Queen Elizabeth I were transported to 1977, plunged into the thick of the second Elizabethan age, what would she think? This question forms the basis of Derek Jarman's 1978 film *Jubilee* — a hallucinatory romp through the post-apocalyptic landscape of neoliberal Britain. The film has attained cult status over the years as a beloved relic of punk, though it was adamantly deplored by key figures in the scene at the time of its release.[28]

Jubilee endures as a pointed critique of the profound political ambivalence Jarman saw emerging in the late seventies, pervading both the younger generation of punks and the House of Commons.[29] Both were products of years of economic privation and cultural starvation, plagued by the anarchistic torpor of living through the end of history.[30]

Jarman challenged Thatcherite idea(l)s in *Jubilee* by criticizing two incarnations of nihilism: the *no future* philosophy of punk, and the burgeoning form of neoliberal capitalism embodied by Borgia Ginz. The gang of punks central to the story are used to explore two parallel phenomena: the rise of both punk rock and Thatcherism as reactions to the dire economic situation of the 1970s. Further, the film is bracketed by a temporal subversion — or *the past dreamed the future present*, as Jarman expressed it — the time travel of John Dee and Elizabeth I. The illumination of the present through the reanimation of the past would become a cornerstone of Jarman's filmic storytelling.

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[28] Vivienne Westwood was so infuriated by the film that she created a shirt with "an open letter to Derek Jarman," an address with not-so-subtle homophobic undertones. In this letter, she denigrates the film as "the most boring and therefore disgusting film," and Jarman himself as "a gay boy jerk[ing] off through the titillation of his masochistic tremblings." It is no wonder she took offense to *Jubilee*, as it represented her subculture as one of materialistic sell-outs. The delicious irony of producing and *selling* this t-shirt as a rebuttal seems to have been lost on her. | See Mason Leaver-Yap's article "Punking Out: Derek Jarman and Vivienne Westwood on Jubilee."

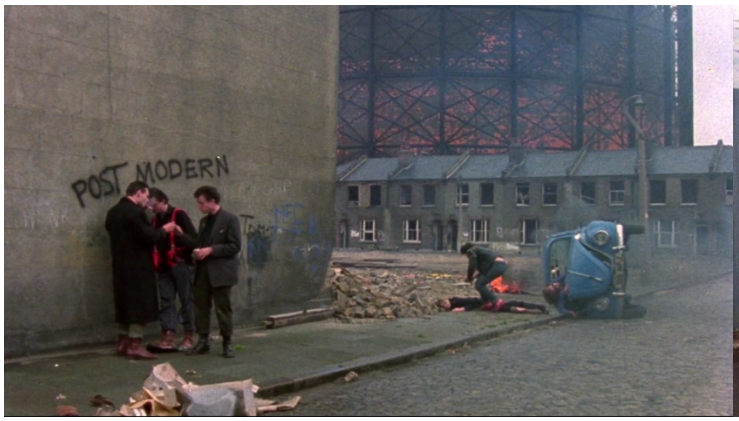
[29] Seventies punk and Thatcherism are less politically divergent than one might think— essentially, they are two sides of the same coin. Despite superficial differences, both ideologies are grounded in the conviction that *there is no alternative*, no future, and that there never has been. Though Thatcher wouldn't become Prime Minister until 1979, she had already been Leader of the Conservative Party since 1975, and her ideas were growing increasingly mainstream.

[30] The following exploration of the political dimension of *Jubilee* is largely influenced by Mark Fisher's writings on Thatcherism, neoliberalism and the late 70s/80s culture wars in the UK — primarily his 2008 book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative* and his 2018 book of collected & unpublished writings, *k-punk*.

Plot Summary — *Jubilee* (1978)

Jubilee begins in at Mortlake in 1597, where Queen Elizabeth I (Jenny Runacre) has come to visit court astrologer, alchemist, and magician John Dee (Richard O'Brien).[31] Dripping with jewels and divinity, the Queen yearns to have discourse with angels. Dee recites a magic spell, calling forth the spirit Ariel.[32] To the Queen's astonishment, Ariel arrives—*Angel*, *mercurial messenger*, *glitter punk*, *scintilla*—materializing in a lithe form with solid black eyes and fingernails. John Dee tells the Angel what her Majesty desires: "to have knowledge, to swim in those pure waters that are the essence that bind all creation." Ariel obliges, telling the Queen: "I shall reveal to thee the shadow of this time."

The shadow of this time turns out to be 1977 Britain: a post-apocalyptic landscape. Dee, The Queen, and her lady-in-waiting are transported four centuries into the future, to the year the Queen's 20th century successor, Queen Elizabeth II, is meant to be celebrating her Silver Jubilee, marking 25 years on the throne. The second Elizabethan age, lying on the other end of the Industrial Revolution, is marked by derelict, graffitied infrastructure, anarchy, and savage violence. Law and order were abolished long ago, so the crime rate has dropped to zero. Youths can be found looting the bodies of the dead. Gunfire rings in the distance as a baby stroller burns by the side of the road. Nearby, girls with safety-pinned noses, Siouxsie Sioux makeup and paramilitary outfits terrorize one another with machine guns. Welcome to postmodernity, the time after time.



[31] These details came out of Jarman's fascination with alchemy and the occult. The film owes just as much to lifelong obsessions with William Blake and Carl Jung.

[32] The Spirit Ariel was a character plucked from *The Tempest.* /John Dee's spell goes: *Metratron! Angel commander of the ten hosts. I cast for Ariel, pearl of fire, my only star. God's moonbeam, send forth my flower, my green herb. The smoke and ashes of ages past which hangs like morning mists in veils across the universe parts in swirls and eddies, through them a shooting star. My angel flies with mirrored eyes leaving a sparkling phosphorescent trail across the universe, down, down, he plummets towards earth, through the great vacuum, on the curve of infinity and like a fiery rose descends to Mortlake.*

Their odyssey takes the form of a series of vignettes, centered around a group of wayward punks. The gang cohabitates in a derelict space, described in the screenplay as "a cavernous decaying room where the discarded artefacts of our dying civilisation are assembled."[33] Their ringleader is Bod (Jenny Runacre in a dual role), Queen Elizabeth I's true 20th-century counterpart. An anarchist of doubtful convictions, Bod saunters around her shattered castle, Queen Elizabeth II's stolen crown on her head—an accessory Bod pinched after strangling the Queen in a throwaway mugging. Bod was named after the British folk hero Boadicea, queen of the British Celtic Iceni tribe, who led a revolt against Roman rule in ancient Britain.[34] She is described in the screenplay as *Anybody, Queen of the New Age, Antithesis of Elizabeth*. In other words, she is the perverted Boadicea to Queen Elizabeth I's Astraea — Virgin goddess of truth and justice, the last of the immortal goddesses to leave the Earth amidst "the decline of the ages."[35]

The other characters are similarly archetypal, a Breakfast Club of nihilistic thrill seekers in a world devoid of thrills. Amyl Nitrate (punk icon Jordan) is the *historian of the void*, who scribbles alternative histories in notebooks and idolizes serial killer Myra Hindley.[36] Chaos (Hermine Demoriane) is a French tightrope-walking au pair who never speaks. Crabs (Nell Campbell of Rocky Horror fame) is an actress and romantic nymphomaniac who pines for one-night stands after murdering them. Kid (Adam Ant) is a young musician who thirsts for fame and success. Mad (Toyah Willcox) is an amoral pyromaniac, a 'revolutionary' always making one earth-shattering declaration or another. All of them yearn to be famous, and dress in a punky style, with sharp geometric shapes painted on their faces. Their minds are rolodexes of canned political declarations which ring hollow,

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[33] London's Docklands, where *Jubilee* was shot, served for many years as a haven for young creatives and squatters, including Jarman himself. Rubble from the Blitz was never cleaned up, leaving the neighborhood littered with the refuse of history. | Jarman, *Jubilee: Six Film Scripts*, 47.

[34] Pruit, "Who Was Boudica?", https://www.history.com/news/who-was-boudica.

[35] More on Elizabethan symbolism and Astraea can be found in Frances Yates' article "Queen Elizabeth as Astraea."

[36] Myra Hindley became infamous in the sixties for kidnapping and murdering children for fun—an unimaginable evil turned banal pastime in the world of *Jubilee*. | Amyl Nitrate was a misspelling of 'amyl nitrite,' the chemical found in 'poppers' (inhalants used recreationally for their muscle-relaxing properties, a cultural staple of 70s discotheques and the 90s rave scene). There was suspicion in the early days of AIDS about a link between the use of poppers and Kaposi's sarcoma, but this was disproven. See Virginia Berridge's book *AIDS in the UK: The Making of Policy, 1981-1994*.

scarcely concealing a numb disillusionment. As Amyl Nitrate puts it: "life in England these days is inflationary, but we're carrying on regardless, coping with misgovernment and idiocy on every side."[37]

Every Hell needs a Hades, and in *Jubilee*, he is Borgia Ginz (Jack Birkett): a megalomaniac tycoon who "owns the media" and worships at the altar of progress.[38] Ginz—described in the screenplay as *the sinister impresario of mediocrity,* the *King of Kapital*—is the quasi-human embodiment of unbridled capitalism, obsessed with accruing wealth and power. In one scene, as he sits in an empty opera house munching on live goldfish from a bowl, he tells "his story" — how he came to own the world by purchasing an alphabet soup of acronyms[39] :

> This is the generation who grew up and forgot to lead their lives. They were so busy watching my endless movie. It's power, babe, Power! I don't create it, I own it. I sucked, and sucked, and sucked. The media became their only reality, and I owned their world of flickering shadows. BBC, TUC, ATV, ABC, ITV, CIA, CBA, NFT, MGM, KGB, C of E. You name it, I bought them all and rearranged the alphabet. Without me, they don't exist.

The patron saint of capitalist realism, Borgia Ginz holds such sway over the levers of power and capital that everyone stutters uncontrollably when they speak to him. Borgia is also likened to Judas, described as "the man who picked up the thirty pieces of silver and made the movie you saw on TV."[40] In the absence of any faith or governing body, Borgia Ginz has come to own everything, running a disintegrating world as he sees fit.

In her voyage around the shadow of her time, Queen Elizabeth I discovers two people who were murdered by Bod: first, Queen Elizabeth II, and then Ginz's number one star, Lounge Lizard (played by transgender punk icon Jayne County). After coming upon Lounge Lizard's dead body, the Queen asks the angel Ariel in a small, trembling voice: *Where is God? Is God dead?*

The only salvation to be found is at an orgiastic party, thrown in the long-abandoned crypts of Westminster Cathedral. The cathedral has been purchased by Ginz and converted into a discotheque:

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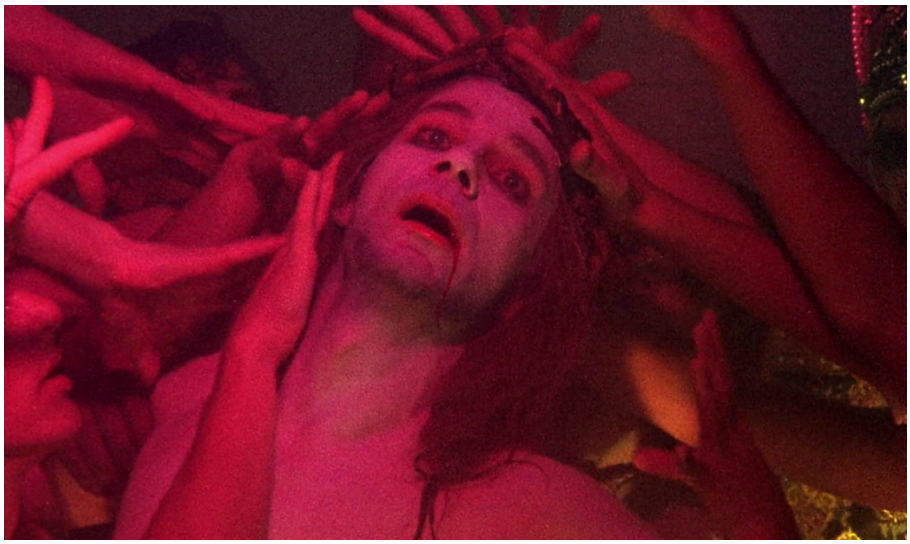
[37] Jarman, *Jubilee: Six Film Scripts*, 49.
[38] In one scene, Ginz opines to his willowy, mysterious assistants: "Without progress, life would be unbearable. Progress is taking the place of Heaven. It's like pornography... better than the real thing." | Jarman, *Jubilee: Six Film Scripts*, 68.
[39] Jarman, *Jubilee: Six Film Scripts*, 56-7.
[40] Pencak, *The Films of Derek Jarman*, 137.

the palace of heavenly delights. Inside, as a genderbending Jesus (Lindsay Kemp) floats over a sea of twelve gyrating apostles, a disco mix of the patriotic English hymn "Jerusalem" plays, designating this space a New Jerusalem.[41] The scene is sacrilegious in a quintessentially Jarmanesque way, polishing unabashed gay sexuality with a sheen of the sacred and ancient. In an illuminated corner of the club, bodies of indistinct gender are knotted together — a blasphemous, divine human entanglement:



In the crypts beneath the nave, a New Jerusalem. Lindsay Kemp as Jesus Christ.

However, this rare moment of genuine sympathy (literally, 'feeling together') is spoiled by two forces: Borgia Ginz, the capitalist realist par excellence, and the hyper-militarized police. First, the whole event is co-opted by Ginz as a staged spectacle. Then the cops show up, bringing a violent sexuality to the party. The aggressive eroticism of the police officers demonstrates the kind of destructive repression and repressive destruction Jarman saw poisoning the 'straight world.'

The only family of sorts that exists in *Jubilee* is Sphinx (Karl Johnson) and Angel (Ian Charleston), a pair of incestuous brothers, along with Viv: *an artist, sympathetic, destroyed.* As opposed to hardened nihilists like Bod (who claims "love snuffed it with the hippies"), Viv, Sphinx

[41] This mix of "Jerusalem" is a perfect example of past and present colliding in the form of a prophecy. The words of the hymn were plucked from William Blake's early nineteenth century poetry — *And did those feet in ancient time, Walk upon England's mountains green: And was the holy Lamb of God, On England's pleasant pastures seen!* Blake's epic poses the possibility of Jesus arriving in England, creating a Heaven there in place of the *dark satanic mills* of the Industrial Revolution. Jarman was deeply influenced by Blake, and his answer to the old Master's prophecy is two-fold. The only salvation one can find from the artificiality of modernity is in nature: the modern nature of a well-tended garden, or one's own true nature. | More on the original poem in Vincent Katz's essay for the Poetry Foundation.

and Angel are the three most genuine characters of the group, seeming to have retained their humanity more than the others. In one scene, after Bod, Mad and Crabs have just disposed of one of Crabs' murdered boy toys, the sound of Angel singing the traditional Scottish ballad "My Love is Like a Red Red Rose" bleeds through non-diegetically. This is followed by a vignette of Sphinx, Viv, and Angel lying together, sharing introspective musings on their lives and their love for one another. The familiarity and genuine affection between the three of them is juxtaposed sharply against the impersonal violence and callous irony of their world.

In a scene titled *BUILDING THE PAST PRESENT*, Angel, Sphinx and Kid look out over the barren sweep of the city, Borgia Ginz's cackling laughter still ringing. Sphinx points out the tower block where he and Angel were born, and waxes poetic about the sterile artificiality of their childhood:

> Never lived below the fourteenth floor till I was old enough to run away. Never saw the ground before I was four, just locked alone with the telly all day. The first time I saw flowers I freaked. I was frightened of dandelions. My gran picked one and I had hysterics. Everything was regulated in that tower block, planned by the social planners to the lowest common denominator. Sight: concrete, sound: the telly, taste: plastic, touch: plastic, the seasons regulated by the thermostat... Didn't know I was dead till I was fifteen. Never experienced love or hate. My generation's the blank generation.[42]

Kid snickers at Sphinx's earnest speech, and the cheesy reference it ended with — an allusion to Richard Hell's 1977 debut *Blank Generation*, one of the enduring relics of 70s punk. This monologue, clearly colored by autobiography, is one of many examples in *Jubilee* where nature is posed as a healing antidote to the poison of pre-planned, pre-fitted desire. Viv, Sphinx and Angel, a strange but tender trio, are particularly drawn to flowers, the last remaining crumbs of a living world. In one scene, the boys find rosebushes for Viv in desolate suburbia and present her with a flower - a sweet, childlike gesture.

[42] Jarman, *Jubilee: Six Film Scripts*, 64.

In search of more flowers, Sphinx and Angel take Viv to Max's flower shop in a stolen car.[43] Once they get there, they find that Max, the *bingo-playing mercenary*, has sprayed his plants with poison and replaced them with plastic ones. In his garden of simulacra, Max complains about the dreariness of a war where nobody is prepared to press the Red Button. "The army was a fucking con," Max says as he scrubs plastic petunias with detergent. "It was their way of solving the unemployment problem before they gave up entirely... Personally though, I prefer the world dead. It's cleaner."

Despite Max's desecration of modern nature, gardens and flowers maintain a pure, singular significance. Even the lingering smells of dead flowers are held dear: traces of life, a paradise lost. As Amyl Nitrate applies perfume, she smiles and says to herself: "Carnation from Floris, not all the good things have disappeared."[44] When Queen Elizabeth I and John Dee set off on their odyssey through time, Dee signs her with "the codes and counter-codes, the secret language of flowers." The future into which the Angel Ariel ushers them is described as "the winter of thy flowers."

In his analysis of *Jubilee*, William Pencak explains the deep sense of ironic distance and nihilism pervading this imminent, dystopian future. "What we have deluded ourselves into believing are beauty, conversation, love, and community in the modern wasteland are really artificial, pale, or perverse imitations of things past. Evil is reduced to banal chit-chat: it doesn't register."[45] This numbness to evil in the face of economic and spiritual devastation is highlighted in a scene at Max's Bingo Parlor, where two elderly ladies are chatting about the recent murder of a mutual friend by the tyrannical Special Branch. "They threw the toaster in the bath, and she was electrocuted," one of them laments. The other woman shrugs. "What do you expect with millions unemployed?"[46]

The failure of evil to truly register is echoed by the hollowness of Amyl's and Mad's political declarations. The ironic distance they take from the horrors of the outside world is further emphasized by their fetishization of nationalist nostalgia and fascism. One moment, Mad claims that "the world is no longer interested in heroes," and the next, Amyl can be heard wailing: "I've broken my Winston

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[43] Jarman, *Jubilee: Six Film Scripts*, 61-62.

[44] Amyl later uses the same perfume as a weapon, blinding a police officer by spraying it in his eyes — yet another desecration of modern nature.

[45] Pencak, *The Films of Derek Jarman*, 136.

[46] Later in this scene, Sphinx and Angel are martyred in a random attack by the Special Branch police force, shot after coquettishly poking at an officer: "Come on, give us a kiss."

Churchill mug!" The mess of posters pasted on the walls include an image of Hitler, his mustache made of staples, bearing the scrawled words "BRAVE NEW WORLD." Crabs, Mad, Amyl and Bod eventually end up in Dorset, a fascist state wrapped in barbed wire, where "Blacks, homosexuals and Jews are banned." In a stately mansion requisitioned by Ginz, a retired Hitler daydreams on the couch. To the giggles of the girls, he mumbles in German that he was "the greatest artist of this century, greater than Leonardo Da Vinci."

In an early version of the screenplay, Jarman wrote that *Jubilee* was dedicated to "all those who secretly work against the tyranny of Marxists fascists trade unionists maoists capitalists socialists etc... who have conspired together to destroy the diversity and holiness of each life in the name of materialism... For William Blake."[47] This call to revere the diversity and holiness of life in the face of homogenizing dogmas is reminiscent of the Angel Ariel's humanism. "Consider the world's diversity and worship it," he says. "By denying its multiplicity you deny your own true nature." *Jubilee* is a repudiation of totalizing ideologies of any kind, be they dressed in studded leather jackets or sensible business-casual pantsuits.

Punk, Violence, & Capitalist Realism in Late 70s Britain

The prominence of sex and sadism in *Jubilee* was, quite predictably, targeted by censors as a celebration of violence. This could not be further from the truth. A helpful point of comparison would be Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film *A Clockwork Orange*, a movie often accused of glorifying crime, rape, and 'ultraviolence.'[48] Unlike the banquet of hedonistic horror enjoyed by Alex and his *droogs*, *Jubilee*'s horror is pure anhedonia. The brutal acts committed by the apathetic ruffians in *Jubilee* are anything but glorious or pleasurable. While it may seem that this gang of punks—wandering the bowels of the dying city, mugging and murdering people for fun—are violent sadists of a similar breed, their lives are so drained of meaning that they kill just for something to do. Mad carves the word 'LOVE' in Bod's back and pours salt into the wound, but she doesn't flinch. Even self-inflicted pain fails to soothe their malaise. Occasionally, sporadic bursts of violence are followed by

[47] Peake, *Derek Jarman*, 246.
[48] Pauline Kael, "Stanley Strangelove." *The New Yorker Magazine*, 1972, www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/doc/0051.html.

flashes of clarity. In the middle of beating a police officer, Mad falls apart and breaks down crying, a rare moment of genuine feeling.

Apathetic youth in this postmodern hellscape grasp at any sort of meaning or purpose, only to find themselves drowning in the rotten detritus of history. The walls of their living spaces are cluttered with symbols and slogans, a universe of meanings which none of them can decode. The only person who does not live in such a chaotic atmosphere is Viv, an autobiographical phantom of Jarman.[49] Viv is an introspective painter who no longer paints, claiming that "painting's extinct." She lives in an empty room with the walls and windows painted black.

Jarman's ambivalence about punk largely came from the discrepancy between punk as an aesthetic (which greatly inspired him) and the Frankenstein's monster of a political ideology to which it lent itself. In a 1976 diary, he dismissed the instigators of punk as "the same old petit bourgeois art students, who a few months ago were David Bowie and Bryan Ferry look-alikes – who've read a little art history and adopted some Dadaist typography and bad manners, and who are now in the business of reproducing a fake street credibility."[50] This kind of hypocritical posturing becomes dangerous when an aesthetic becomes a political ideology—only for that political ideology to be co-opted as an aesthetic, drained of any anti-establishment potential it might once have possessed. The autocannibalism of punk in *Jubilee* is a reminder that this is the second generation of punk: a subculture transformed into a mainstream cultural phenomenon. So how could the ideological umbrella of punk stretch so wide, from socialists like The Clash, Billy Bragg, or Tom Robinson to the far-right, neo-fascist National Front?[51]

Originally, punk was synonymous with non-subordination. In his brilliant book on Jarman's filmography, Roland Wymer traces the origins of 1970s British punk subculture back to previous subcultural movements that had taken place in France. Punk derived many of its anti-establishment

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[49] In 1978, Jarman told *Gay News*: "Viv is based on myself: rather sad, slightly ridiculous... a slightly failed artist, who has dreams but ends up in a black room because that's the truest thing she could do." Quoted in *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations*, p. 64.

[50] Ellis, *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations*, 61-62.

[51] The National Front was Britain's fourth most popular political party in the late seventies. Its existence is nodded at with a signature wryness when Bod complains that "the only thing that's open after eleven in this fucking country are the police cells," to which Mad quips: "If you're bored, join the National Front!"

and anti-consumerist principles from the French situationists, whose frenetic energy culminated in the Mai '68 student protests in Paris.[52] But where so many movements in rock music sprang from times of relative prosperity (which tend to form the basis for the existence of a youth culture) combined with social/political discontent, this second generation ended up in a strange spot. The (counter)cultural equivalent of 'Generation Jones,' they showed up after the gold rush, only to find themselves in a sort of purgatory, where nobody can quite tell if they're ahead of or just behind the curve. The thing about the apocalypse is that it is not so merciful as apocalyptic scripture like the Book of Daniel promised; it doesn't erupt but winks out slowly.[53]

Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* is a useful tool for analyzing *Jubilee*, as it helps situate the imagined lives of these aimless punks within the reality of wider cultural and political trends. Fisher defines *capitalist realism* as "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it."[54] This is reminiscent of Francis Fukuyama's famous proclamation just before the fall of the Berlin Wall that the "End of History" had come, as the triumph of Western liberal democracy and the reign of neoliberal capitalism were assured forever.[55] Many of the key issues Fisher draws into his definition of capitalist realism are present in *Jubilee*: namely, the destruction of public space, the precorporation of aesthetics with subversive potential, and the "attitude of ironic distance" proper to neoliberal capitalism.

Fisher uses Alfonso Cuarón's 2006 film *Children of Men* as a case study of a neoliberal dystopia. "In *Children of Men*, public space is abandoned, given over to uncollected garbage and stalking… Neoliberals, the capitalist realists par excellence, have celebrated the destruction of public space but, contrary to their official hopes, there is no withering away of the state in *Children of Men*,

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[52] Wymer, *Derek Jarman*, 55.

[53] Post-punk would then morph into goth, a subculture even more entrenched in the legends, aesthetics, and melancholia of the past.

[54] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, 6.

[55] Fukuyama explained that the ideological struggles and revolutionary potentials of the past — ideas and possible futures people were willing to give their lives for — have been supplanted in the post-historical period by "economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands." | Fukuyama, "The End of History?", 17.

only a stripping back of the state to its core military and police functions."[56] This resonates deeply with the landscape we see in *Jubilee*—one of crumbling infrastructure and institutions, abandoned housing projects, and a hyper-militarized police force. *Jubilee* prophetically foreshadowed the radical changes to British life that the austerity of Thatcher's neoliberal regime would soon bring.

As mentioned above, the punks in *Jubilee* are revealed to be the opposite side of Thatcherism's nihilistic coin. In the end, all of them sell out, exposing the flimsiness of their anti-establishment convictions by collaborating with Borgia Ginz. Fisher warned of a fundamental shift in capitalism and culture, from the *incorporation* of materials previously seeming to possessive subversive potentials to their *precorporation*: "the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture."[57] Subversion itself becomes commodified, and the desires of human beings become mere extensions of the corporate interests they serve.[58] Riffing on the works of Alain Badiou, he also diagnoses mainstream culture with a "turn from belief to aesthetics, from engagement to spectatorship."[59] The anarchistic boredom pervading *Jubilee* is a stinging indictment of the "attitude of ironic distance" proper to neoliberal capitalism. *Capitalist realism* emerges as a shield protecting us from fanaticism, from the perils of belief itself. The result is a conviction politics without conviction, drifting towards the inevitable conclusion that fundamental change is impossible.

So here, as in the post-apocalyptic landscape of *Jubilee*, 'realism' morphs into nihilism, leaving a generation of young people plagued by the feeling that the future has been cancelled.[60] Through this film, Jarman criticizes both the ideology of capitalist realism *and* those who claim to subvert it while simultaneously feeding into it. The punks in *Jubilee* are horrific because of their lack of belief — they look at the world with an attitude of "ironic distance," ultimately selling out to the capital-S System

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[56] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 8.
[57] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 9. Fisher goes on to point out that "'alternative' and 'independent' don't designate something outside mainstream culture; rather, they are styles, in fact the dominant styles, within the mainstream."
[58] This is critiqued pointedly through Sphinx's speech about his over-regulated childhood, discussed above on page 13.
[59] Another key quote from *Capitalist Realism*: "In claiming to have delivered us from the 'fatal abstractions' inspired by the 'ideologies of the past', capitalist realism presents itself as a shield protecting us from the perils posed by belief itself. The **attitude of ironic distance** proper to postmodern capitalism is supposed to immunize us against the seductions of fanaticism... The 'realism' here is analogous to the deflationary perspective of a depressive who believes that any positive state, any hope, is a dangerous illusion" (9).
[60] In many other writings, Mark Fisher discusses what he called the *slow cancellation of the future*, engaging his thoughts on nostalgia and lost futures with Derrida's writings on 'hauntology.' See Fisher's 2014 collection *Ghosts of My Life*.

they purport to counteract. "Capitalism," Mark Fisher explains, "is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics."[61] There is no better way to describe the characters in *Jubilee*: consumer-spectators, schlepping through the rubble of the past and the residues of a cancelled future.

In his introduction to the screenplay, Michael O'Pray compared *Jubilee* to Walter Benjamin's Angel of History — looking back to the past from the standpoint of contemporary England, and conjuring from this strange temporal alchemy a prophecy for the future.[62] Now, the film stands out as a haunting warning of the consequences of austerity and hollow political rhetoric. This film established one of Jarman's trademark techniques: boldly subverting the linear timeline, refracting history through a convex lens.

[61] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 2.
[62] O'Pray, Michael. Introduction to Jarman's screenplay collection *Jubilee: Six Film Scripts*.

Transtemporal & Transgressive Kinship in *Edward II* (1991)

"How to make a film of a gay love affair and get it commissioned. Find a dusty old play and violate it."
— Derek Jarman, *Queer Edward II.*[63]

The pillar of Thatcherism Jarman countered most brazenly in *Edward II* was 'Thatcherite morality.' This ideology, a litany of moral stances on the most intimate aspects of life, has often been referred to as 'Victorian moral values.' So, what exactly did 'Victorian moral values' mean, and why were they incessantly invoked during the culture wars of the 1980s?

In the Victorian era, sexuality took on a very different role in public life: a tool of control and social cohesion on one side, blackmail and criminal prosecution on the other. The Labouchere Amendment was added to the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885, establishing "gross indecency" as a criminal offense.[64] Though other European nations cracked down on homosexual activity around that time, Britain was the only Western European country to dish out draconian penalties for any gay sex acts into the 20th century.[65] An iconic casualty of this legislation was Oscar Wilde, imprisoned and sentenced to two years of hard labor for enacting *the love that dare not speak its name*.[66,67]

The mounting hostility towards male homosexuality during the late Victorian Era, and the legal prosecution that resulted, were inseparable from the seismic shifts in urbanization and industrial capitalism that were occurring at the time. Of course, homosexuality has existed since time immemorial, but it was during the late 19th century that the 'Homosexual' as such became a nameable menace. The invention of the Homosexual in the cultural and legal imagination coincided with the invention of the 'nuclear family,' a decidedly Victorian institution. In his essay "'Sins and Diseases': Some Notes on Homosexuality in the Nineteenth Century," Jeffrey Weeks writes of this linkage:

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[63] Jarman, Derek, Stephen McBride and Ken Butler, *Queer Edward II*, dedication page.
[64] The first anti-buggery law was established in 1533 under Henry VIII, and anti-buggery laws would remain on the books in England and Wales until 1967. See Peter Tatchell's 2017 article in *The Guardian.*
[65] A similar crackdown occurred in Germany in 1870, when the Prussian legal code's anti-homosexual clause was integrated into the Empire's legal code as Paragraph 175 (Weeks, 213).
[66] Adut, "A theory of scandal: Victorians, homosexuality, and the fall of Oscar Wilde," 213-248.
[67] This atmosphere of sexual paranoia subjected another illustrious Briton to a similar fate—computing pioneer Alan Turing, who saved innumerable lives by cracking the German Enigma Code during World War II. Almost sixty years after Wilde, Turing was also convicted of gross indecency and was chemically castrated as a result. | More information on Wilde's conviction can be found in Keith Dockray's book *Politics, Society and Homosexuality in Post-War Britain.*

> The elevation of the family, as a buttress to social stability, fitted in well with the demands of capital in the 1880s, as it confronted its twin threats: imperialist rivalries, and the working class... The effect was to sharpen the dividing line between acceptable and non-acceptable forms of sexuality.[68]

Further, the turn from religious to scientific explanations of the social world cast homophobic bigotry in the light of scientific rationalism. Poet and essayist J.A. Symonds noted in the late 19th century that medicine was taking the place the Church had once held in shaping public opinion.[69] What was once branded a sinful perversion was now perceived as an inversion, a disease of the will.

The same narratives of sexual purity and moral objectivism that drove the first wave of anti-gay legislation found a new home in the Thatcher era. Victorian-era measures like gross indecency laws, aimed at controlling the 'deviants' among the populace, were mimicked by Thatcher-era policies, which similarly politicized and criminalized private life. The onslaught of homophobic legislation in the 1980s—amounting to an effective recriminalization of homosexuality—included discriminatory measures like Section 28, unequal ages of consent, bias in foster care and adoption, increased penalties for cruising, and involuntary detention for AIDS patients.[71] Rising bigotry stoked by the AIDS crisis was further exacerbated by moral panics like the "video nasties" controversy and Operation Spanner.

English puritanical repression was antithetical to everything Jarman believed in. During his own lifetime, he had seen the explicit ban on homosexual acts lifted, only to see centuries-old prejudices return in more covert and insidious forms.[72] The language of Section 28, criminalizing the "promotion" of homosexuality as a "pretended family relationship," raised questions Jarman had long been wrestling with: *What does family really mean, and who gets to lay claim to 'family values'?* His answer, infused with a visceral rage, was *Edward II:* a film asserting that there *must* be an alternative. The film challenges the oppressive and repressive regime of 'Victorian morality' by realizing two alternative visions of family: *transgressive kinship* and *transtemporal kinship*.

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[68] Weeks, "'Sins and Diseases': Some Notes on Homosexuality in the Nineteenth Century," 215.

[69] Into the mid-twentieth century, many of those in favor of liberalizing anti-sodomy law believed that homosexuality was a medical problem, akin to alcoholism or drug addiction, in need of treatment rather than incarceration.

[71] In 1985, as paranoia around HIV and AIDS proliferated, Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke "enacted powers to detain people with AIDS in hospital against their will." | More information can be found in Katharine Swindells' *Pink News* article "On the 50th anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act, a timeline of 2,000 years of gay rights history."

[72] Text of Sexual Offences Act 1967: legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/60/pdfs/ukpga_19670060_en.pdf

Plot Summary — *Edward II* (1991)

Derek Jarman's 1991 biopic *Edward II*, an adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's 1593 play, chronicles King Edward II's ill-fated relationship with his favorite, Piers Gaveston. The film begins directly after the death of Edward I, when the newly minted King Edward II (Steven Waddington) summons Gaveston back to the realm after a period of exile. We first see Gaveston reading the King's letter aloud with glee, as two sailors make out behind him: "'My father is deceased; come, Gaveston, and share the kingdom with thy dearest friend.' Ah, words that make me surfeit with delight!" (1.1.1-3).[73] He rolls his eyes at the canoodling travelers: "There are hospitals for men like you."

The return of the King's saucy, unpopular lover (played with youthful irreverence by Andrew Tiernan) causes an uproar in the kingdom, but pure bliss for the king. Gaveston sweats unadulterated devotion, sometimes to the point of violence.[74] Though Gaveston was not born to noble stock, King Edward worships the ground he walks on, and bestows upon him a number of titles: "Lord High Chamberlain, Chief Secretary to the state and me, Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man." Even the King's brother, Kent, has reservations about Gaveston, claiming to dead ears: "These titles far exceed his worth."

The King's enemies mount up. Gossipy, power-hungry Lords deride the King's 'perversion,' deeming Gaveston a self-interested social climber. The most vociferous and powerful among the King's detractors is Lord Mortimer (Nigel Terry), a nobleman in charge of the military with an envious eye on the throne. Mortimer becomes romantically entangled with King Edward's touch-starved wife, Queen Isabelle (Tilda Swinton), ensnaring the trio in a Bermuda triangle of lust and resentment.

The Queen is clearly a Thatcherite figure, in all her cold-blooded ferocity, symbolic of a culture of repression. The royal marriage is a disaster; poor Isabelle could not possibly be *less* appealing to the King. Her futile attempts at seducing her husband end with him bashing his own head against the wall in frustration, drawing blood, as she looks on with an air of boredom. Isabelle is not even phased by his self-inflicted violence—she has grown used to this.

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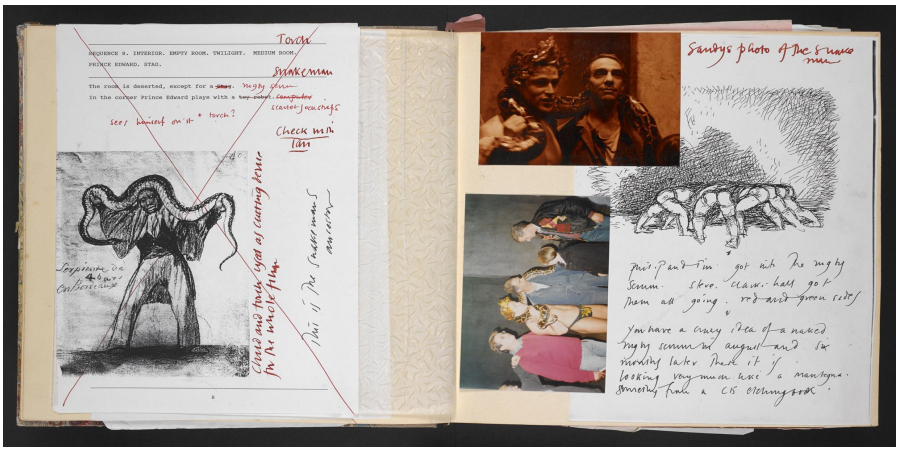
[73] Marlowe, Christopher. *Edward II Revised*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014. Print.

[74] In one bloody scene, a priest condemning the King and his favorite ends up tortured to a pulp in a dungeon, where Gaveston removes the old man's dentures and makes the sign of the cross with them, using his own spit as holy water.

In spite of their sexual incompatibility, the King and Queen have produced an heir, young Edward III (Jody Graber). The prince is everything he is not supposed to be: androgynous, curious, strange. In a word, queer. An all-seeing eye in the labyrinthine castle, he wanders dusty, darkened tunnels, listening in on conversations he's not meant to hear, and seeing things he's not meant to see. In one surreal sequence, the little prince's electric flashlight lands on a stunning sight: a naked all-male rugby scrum, at which he gapes through the darkness. The germination of this surreal imagery can be observed in Jarman's scrapbook (which also served as an annotated shooting script)[76]:



The bad blood between Gaveston and Queen Isabelle comes to a boil in one quietly explosive scene, where he sneaks up on her in a darkened corridor. Blessed with boyish good looks and a sly, unreadable grin, he backs her up against a wall and slowly goes in for a kiss, lingering for a moment. When she desperately goes in to reciprocate, he pulls away and bursts into laughter, humiliating her. "Villain!" Isabelle spits. "'Tis thou that robb'st me of my lord." To which Gaveston flings back the acrid retort: "No Madam, 'tis *you* that rob me of *my* lord." In this terse exchange, the terms of civil war are established; one of them must die.

The King is forced to sign Gaveston back into exile.[77] However, after a period of banishment in France, Queen Isabelle allows Gaveston to return. This is met with jubilation from him and the King—not yet realizing that he has ultimately been brought back to be executed.

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[76] Jarman's sketchbook via the British Library: www.bl.uk/collection-items/derek-jarmans-queer-sketchbook - footnote1. The book is a useful artifact of *Edward II*'s progression from percolating visions to a finished film.

[77] The deportation order bears the House of Commons insignia and the date "1991."

Mortimer reveals his true intentions and resentments while describing Gaveston, who purportedly "wears a Lord's revenue on his back, and Midas-like he jets it in the court, with base outlandish cullions at his heels" (1.4.615). Mortimer describes the King's antics with even more bitterness, telling him to his face: "The idle triumphs, masques, lascivious shows, and prodigal gifts bestowed on Gaveston have drawn thy treasure dry, and made thee weak" (2.2.265). When a Peer asks Mortimer if he will take up arms against the King, Mortimer replies, grinning at a clergyman beside him: "What need I? God himself is up in arms" (1.2.63).

The Queen and Mortimer engineer a coup of sorts against the King, taking advantage of the Peers' distaste for his relationship with Gaveston. The ensuing civil war is reimagined as a fight between the homophobic establishment on one side, the King and his allies on the other. Mortimer's army are deployed with modern riot gear and automatic weapons, while Edward's army are depicted as protesters from the gay rights organization OutRage.

In truth, all of the King's enemies are helplessly hypocritical, guilty of the same sins they claim to deplore. The Queen is thirsty for blood and power, and the entire court is full of social climbers. Meanwhile, Mortimer can often be found in the throes of sadomasochistic menages à trois with prostitutes he pays to humiliate and feminize him. Nobody is thriving under the strict heteronormative regime, leading to a great feeling of resentment, and a desire to scapegoat the lovers at the center of it all. Mortimer's character is emblematic of the thinly veiled political corruption, perversion, greed and hubris lingering beneath the veneer of heteronormative respectability.[78] It would be a mistake to claim that sexuality is just an incidental element in this war, but Mortimer's story is truly about money and power, just as *Edward II* is a film about the 1980s more than the 1320s. Under the guise of protecting social order and the economic interests of the kingdom, Mortimer wages a war against both the King he envies, and his own nature. Meanwhile, Edward and Gaveston are brazenly,

[78] This dynamic of adulterers capitalizing on homophobia for their own political gain brings to mind the four-year affair between Edwina Currie and John Major, both of whom were content to pick at the sawdust in the eyes of private citizens whilst ignoring the planks in their own. Tory MP Edwina Currie was essentially Britain's answer to Anita Bryant. She was Junior Health Minister from 1986-1988 until being forced to resign by a big salmonella-in-eggs controversy. Though she was not religious herself, Currie famously opined that "good Christian people don't get AIDS." | Milton, *Pink News*, pinknews.co.uk/2020/05/12/edwina-currie-health-minister-this-morning-aids-coronavirus-susanna-reid-piers-morgan.

shamelessly true, and are forced to pay the price. Kent ultimately dies for being loyal to his brother, when the livid Queen bites into his neck and sucks his blood.

In a dank cave, as a non-diegetic children's choir sings "Resurrexit," the King is impaled with a burning spike by men in studded leather jackets, the Queen's laughter still ringing in his ears. This terrifying scene is revealed to be a nightmare. The King narrowly escapes a ghastly execution when Lightborn, the assassin sent to kill him (played by H.B.), drops his burning poker and gives him a kiss of life—a twist on the grim original ending.

Mortimer and the Queen are granted their long-coveted victory, if only for a moment. The two giddily rush to the throne, giggling with delight, drunk on their newfound power. However, their downfall comes quick when the murder plot against the King falls apart. Dressed in his mother's clothes and makeup, the young future monarch Edward III prances jubilantly atop their cage, listening to Tchaikovsky's "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" on his Walkman. This young prince, in all his unapologetic androgyny and curiosity, represents the Queer Child: the embodiment of hope and endurance.[79]

In the coda of *Edward II*, the camera pans over an immobile crowd of OutRage! protestors, with t-shirts and signs bearing slogans like "queer as fuck" and "gay desire is not a crime." Geared towards sex positivity and togetherness, these messages are the antithesis of the fear and isolation imposed by government campaigns like *AIDS: Don't Die of Ignorance*. As the tableau vivant of queer activism unfolds, the King, Marlowe, and Jarman himself speak from beyond the grave:

But what are Kings, when regiment is gone,
But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?
I know not, but of this I am assured,
That death ends all, and I can die but once.
Come death, and with thy fingers close my eyes,
or if I live let me forget myself.

[79] As Jim Ellis puts it in *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations*, Edward III is "clearly something of a queer figure, and acts as a promise of continuity and future survival" (218).

Section 28 & Institutional Homophobia Under Thatcher

It is important to reclaim our sexuality from those who seek to sanitise an expression and weave it into the fabric of bourgeoise British morality (Jarman, *At Your Own Risk*, 24).

Edward II coincided with a major sea change in queer activism, as AIDS decimated the gay community, and fears proliferated about a "permissive society." The permissive society of Thatcherite nightmares can be best summed up by Conservative Party chairman (1985-1987) Norman Tebbit:

> Bad art was as good as good art. Grammar and spelling were no longer important. To be clean was no better than to be filthy. Good manners were no better than bad. Family life was derided as an outdated bourgeois concept. Criminals deserved as much sympathy as their victims... Violence and soft pornography became accepted in the media. Thus was sown the wind; and we are now reaping the whirlwind.[80]

Tebitt's lecture expressed the terror so many British Conservatives felt in the face of rapid social and political changes in the 1960s.[81] Vociferous homophobes like Mary Whitehouse pushed for the use of censorship to stifle progressive social movements. Despite the New Right principle of 'small government' that Thatcher ran on, the eighties brought crackdowns on 'deviance' of any kind, in a rush of what Stuart Hall dubbed 'authoritarian populism.'[82] The same fear mongering that had been used to stir up paranoia about immigration and a multiracial Britain was carried over into sexuality, as the bedroom became a new battleground for the soul of the nation.[83] In an address to the Conservative Party Conference in 1987, Margaret Thatcher made no illusions about her own perceptions of homosexuality as a menace to young children. "Children are being taught they have an inalienable right to be gay," she said. "All of those children are being cheated of a sound start in life."[84]

When the AIDS epidemic began, and young gay men started dying in massive numbers, the heterosexism inherent in Thatcherism was legitimized. The scourge of HIV-AIDS was used to create a

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[80] Evans, *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities*, 67.
[81] Prestidge, "Housewives Having a Go," 280.
[82] Hall, "Authoritarian populism: A reply to Jessop et al," 115-123.
[83] The correlation between growing racism and homophobia is explored in Anna Marie Smith's essay "The Imaginary Inclusion of the Assimilable 'Good Homosexual': The British New Right's Representations of Sexuality and Race."
[84] Margaret Thatcher, "Speech to Conservative Party Conference," October 9, 1997. Video, 1:13, https://youtu.be/8VRRWuryb4k.

victim-blaming narrative, and a kind of politics of disgust that would prove a powerful tool.[85] Moral panic and mass hysteria surrounding the AIDS crisis paved the way for the first homophobic legislation to be passed in the UK in over a century.[86]

Attempts to combat a 'permissive society' created the foundation for a culture of repression, epitomized by the passing of Section 28 of the Local Government Act in 1988. This symbolic piece of legislation prohibited local authorities from "intentionally promoting homosexuality" or promoting the teaching of homosexuality as "a pretended family relationship."[87] An attack on local/municipal authorities, Section 28 was primarily a symbolic piece of legislation, as it was unclear what could and couldn't be prosecuted under the clause. A slew of consequences ensued out of pure panic: teachers were fired, support groups in schools were disbanded, and literature was removed from libraries. Many teachers felt that they couldn't defend students victimized by homophobic bullying without running the risk of "promoting" homosexuality; it was as though shame itself had been written into the law. Section 28 codified shame that had always existed for queer young people – knowledge, and above all, *understanding* was forbidden.

But Section 28 backfired. It provoked a profound rage, which was channeled into a renaissance of queer activism. Groups like Stonewall, Act Up and OutRage! became more militant in their demands, and began organizing with more vigor, ferocity, and theatricality than ever before. In a time of plague, asking for tolerance would not suffice; the object was demanding respect and equality. Lesbians abseiled into the House of Lords to protest the clause,[88] and 20,000 people marched in

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[85] In 1986, Sir James Anderton, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police, declared that those suffering from HIV and AIDS were "swirling around in a human cesspool of their own making." Bill Brownhill, Conservative leader of South Staffordshire Council, declared at the height of the epidemic that he "would shoot them all... those bunch of queers that legalise filth in homosexuality... It is disgusting and diabolical. As a cure I would put 90% of queers in the ruddy gas chambers." See Glass, 15-16.

[86] According to British Social Attitudes, an annual survey carried out by Social and Community Planning Research, 25% of respondents in 1987 thought that premarital sexual relationships were "always or mostly wrong." Meanwhile, 74% of pollees believed that homosexual relationships were "always or mostly wrong," a jump from 62% four years earlier. 50% of respondents in 1987 thought it unacceptable for a "homosexual person" to be a schoolteacher, and 44% felt the same way about university professors. See Walker's 1988 article in *The Times*.

[87] Reinhold, "Through the Parliamentary Looking Glass: 'Real' and 'Pretend' Families in Contemporary British Politics," 61-77. | In this article, Reinhold quotes Weston's claim that lesbians and gay men were conceived of as "exiled from kinship" (69).

[88] Carter, "Abseil makes the heart grow fonder: lesbian and gay campaigning tactics and Section 28," 221.

Manchester.[89] Groups not traditionally associated with LGBTQ rights also got involved in protesting against Section 28—especially those who were also suffering under Thatcher's government, from coal miners to single mothers.[90]

Language was at the heart of this evolving fight for liberation. The word 'queer' took on a different meaning, a slur reclaimed and reborn as a badge of pride. Section 28's wording (especially the phrase "pretended family relationship") was so singularly painful that it galvanized the queer community. The inconsolable anger and yearning for solidarity undergirding the movement led artists like Derek Jarman to use their respective media to assert the validity of alternative family structures. Jarman's work thunders towards the conclusion that there is more than one way to live a meaningful life, and more than one definition of the word 'family.'

Transgressive & Transtemporal Kinship - *The Time is Out of Joint*[91]

"When I was young, the absence of the past was a terror" (Jarman, *At Your Own Risk*, 30).

Edward II is a story about the present: an indictment of modern-day institutional homophobia, mediated through a re-evaluation of history. Jarman uses Marlowe's play (itself a coded story about the forgotten queer lives of the past) to draw attention to how little homophobic bigotry has changed over the past seven centuries. Buggery laws came and went, but Mortimer's and Isabelle's strategic leveraging of homophobia for political gain rings true to late 20th-century British politics.[92]

Section 28 would never have been passed if these so-called "pretended family relationships" didn't pose a threat to the status quo. In *Edward II*, Jarman uses the story of a dissolving nuclear family to make the case for something new: a conception of family divorced from the constraints and hang-ups of Victorian morality. One can refer to the alternative forms of family offered in *Edward II* as *transgressive kinship* and *transtemporal kinship*.

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[89] Evans, "Section 28: Law, myth, and paradox," 73.

[90] Memorably, a strong coalition was formed between gay rights groups and miners in Wales during the 1984-5 Miner's Strike. See Kelliher's "Solidarity and Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners 1984–5."

[91] Quotation from *Hamlet*: "The time is out of joint; O curs'd spite! / That ever I was born to set it right" (1.5.188).

[92] As the Right Honourable Michael Cashman (EastEnders-star-turned-MEP) put it: "What was so incredible was the political opportunism. Section 28 had been brought in on the back of the stigmatisation and discrimination suffered by gay men; in particular those dealing with AIDS and HIV... this was designed to kick us firmly underground." | See Chris Godfrey's 2018 *Guardian* article "Section 28 protesters 30 years on: 'We were arrested and put in a cell up by Big Ben.'"

The former, transgressive kinship, is exemplified by the love story between the King and his favorite, as well as the quasi-family structure formed between the two men and Edward's young son. The nuclear family of the King, Queen, and their son is more of an atomic family, poisoned by bitterness and resentment. The relationship between Gaveston and the young prince, on the other hand, offers an alternative form of childrearing: queer parenthood, a healing domesticity.

The complex temporality of *Edward II* establishes *transtemporal kinship*—throughlines between queer lives of the past and present, forged through cinematic storytelling.[93] Jarman expresses this continuity by creating multiple layers of 'revisionist history.' The anachronisms permeating *Edward II* are reminders of the 'anytime' space in which the story takes place.

In the film, disparate points in time converge, refracting history through a convex lens. A prime example of this occurs right after the King has been forced to sign Gaveston back into exile, when the two are dancing together for the last time. As the pajama-clad inamoratos slow dance beneath a spotlight, Scottish soul singer Annie Lennox suddenly materializes.[94] A glittery, spotlighted vision, she serenades them with the Cole Porter song, "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye." In this scene, Jarman pulls together disparate threads of queer solidarity—all filtered through his artistic imagination—in the incognito way that queer stories have always been told. Through cinematic sleight-of-hand, the subtext becomes the text.

"Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye," a song about the joy of togetherness and the pain of separation, is stunning because of the coherence between melody and lyrics. The first three bars begin on a major harmony (E♭) followed by a minor harmony (Cm).[95] As the harmony oscillates at the beginning of the song, the melody begins with the same note repeated eight times, emphasizing the feeling of resistance to an impossible but inevitable parting. When Lennox sings *there's no love song finer, but how strange the change from major to Minor,* the words *from major to minor* are mirrored by a change from an A♭ major chord to the unsteady resolution of A♭ minor. Further, the song itself is

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[93] This concept of *transtemporal kinship* owes a lot to Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, where she engages contemporary queer art with ideas of chronopolitics/chrononormativity and 'queer time.'

[94] Lennox had already become a well-known queer icon and advocate for people living with HIV and AIDS. She famously wore a t-shirt reading "HIV Positive," though she was not HIV-positive herself, as a solidarity measure.

[95] Forte, Listening to Classic American Popular Songs, 155-160.

imbued with layers of poignant significance. Porter was gay and not exactly closeted during his lifetime, though he was in an unorthodox, loving marriage of convenience.[96] Doubtlessly inspired by *the love that dare not speak its name*, this song was released in 1944, at the tail end of a war that had brought so many unthinkable but unavoidable goodbyes.

In this surreal musical encounter, Jarman creates convergences between various points: Edward II and Gaveston in the early fourteenth century; Christopher Marlowe writing about their love quite explicitly from his vantage point in the late sixteenth century; finally, pulling in Porter through the artistic vehicle of Annie Lennox's voice. As she leaves, Lennox makes eye contact with the King and Gaveston for a moment—a fond farewell between past and present.

These dimensions of richness are baked into this startling, touching vignette, in such a way that allows for transtemporal understanding. Hence, a sort of kinship is forged, one that transcends both the linear timeline and the bloodlines of heredity. The tender theatricality of Annie Lennox's cameo can be read as an example of what Ann Pellegrini calls "camp sincerity" — a performative melding of moral seriousness and queer aesthetics. This kind of camp brings not only an aesthetic style, but an entirely different way of thinking about history and its preservation. Further, this scene is one example among many of the political use of the anachronism in *Edward II*.

The language in Jarman's film is a gutted and rearranged version of Marlowe's Elizabethan dialogue, punctuated by modern vulgarities. The film is a postmodern adaptation, set in nondescript dungeons with electric lighting, modern cigarettes, and Lords dressed in 1980s business casual. This mixture of old and new allows the film to exist in an in-between space, not a past time but an *anytime*. Scraps of modernity (automatic weapons, the Walkman, a book about Saddam Hussein called *Unholy Babylon*, which Mortimer reads in bed) tug the story into the modern day, forcing the viewer to notice the echoes between the Plantagenet Age and our own second Elizabethan Age.

Jarman's treatment of history is an attempt to fill the vacuum left by shame and censorship. It is through this temporal tinkering that he manages to build a sort of lineage, a healing counterpoint to transgenerational trauma and a culture of repression. Forging such a lineage was especially vital during

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[96] Howe, Robert F. "What is This Thing Called Love?". *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 2004, smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/what-is-this-thing-called-love-2336684/.

the AIDS crisis, a time of tremendous grief and alienation, when it seemed as though an entire generation was being wiped (and wished) out of existence.[97] *Edward II* stands out as a pre-emptive strike of sorts, meant to counteract not only the erasure of queer history by a homophobic society, but also the void Jarman knew would be left for the next generation of young queer people. It can serve as a time capsule for a spiritually orphaned generation, robbed of elders and linkages to a collective past. In the same way that queer stories have always been coded—little nuggets of solidarity tucked into the nuances of a paint stroke or a turn of phrase—Jarman summons truths from the archive, from the words of Christopher Marlowe to the melodies of Cole Porter.

<u>Edward III: The Queer Child</u>

The young prince Edward III represents the undying possibility of the 'Queer Child.' In her essay "History, Activism, and the Queer Child in Derek Jarman's *Queer Edward II* (1991)," Alexandra Parsons analyzes his character in relation to Kathryn Bond Stockton's idea of the *queer child* - a phenomenon created in retrospect, through the memories of adults looking back. "What is illuminating here," Parson writes, "is that Stockton demonstrates how we overlay our nostalgia on our understanding of the child, meaning we only see our own desire to recognize a queer childhood rather than the child itself." She continues:

> Jarman, here, plays with this notion: in the context of Section 28's aim to restrict access to education regarding same-sex experience, Jarman recognized the political importance of highlighting adults' willfully blinkered understanding of childhood experience. Further, Jarman's focus on the queer child offers a challenge to what Lee Edelman

[97] Peter Bruinvels, Conservative MP for Leicester East, stated his support for Section 28: "I do not agree with homosexuality. I think that Clause 28 will help outlaw it and the rest will be done by AIDS... I think that's probably the best way." | Davis, *The Global 1980s: People, Power and Profit*, 100.

> argues is the dominant conception of "the child" as the keystone of a politics of compulsory heterosexual reproductive futurism.[98]

Parson's incisive reading of Jarman and Stockton brings out the sharpness of Jarman's critique of the oppressive "intimate citizenship regime" in the UK.[99] In her book *The Queer Child*, Stockton zeroes in on the inherently queer temporality of childhood. The child, assumed to be heterosexual but not yet sexual, is stuck in the liminal space of not-yet-straightness. For the child who becomes a queer adult in a world where Heterosoc reigns, their existence is in and of itself a kind of failure, the broken promise of reproduction and renewal. As Stockton puts it, "the phrase *gay child* is a gravestone marker for where or when one's straight life died."[100] Further, she refers to this ghostliness hanging over the queer childhood as a kind of "backward birth." This critical way of looking at queerness, childhood and time undermines the standard of the pure, heterosexual child who must be protected from corruption by outside influences—a key assumption underpinning Thatcherite morality.

In his memoir *At Your Own Risk*, Jarman cites the petrifying void in his historical education as the very reason he wrote autobiography. It was an exercise in finding the 'I,' putting oneself pack into the picture. For him, bringing the past into the present through art was a way of forging a lineage: not only a queer heritage, but an inheritance of sorts. As Jarman writes in *Queer Edward II*, "in our film all the OutRage boys and girls are inheritors of Edward's story."[101] The reclamation of one's individual and collective queer past—despite the improbability of continued survival in a homophobic, homogenizing world—is an inherently political act, one which makes a future conceivable.

The complex temporality at the heart of *Edward II* serves to bind queer lives together through commonality and solidarity. *Edward II* stands as a reminder of the continuity and collectivity transcending boundaries of space and time. Further, in forging an alternative heritage and challenging official histories, Jarman reveals just how backward modern homophobia is, a return to 14th-century mindsets.

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[98] Parsons, "History, Activism, and the Queer Child in Derek Jarman's *Queer Edward II* (1991)," 419.
[99] Roseneil et al, "The United Kingdom's Intimate Citizenship Regime," 43-61.
[100] Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, 7.
[101] Jarman, *Queer Edward II*, 146.

Conclusion

In his life and art, Derek Jarman dauntlessly criticized the tendrils of Thatcherism wrapped so tightly around 1980s Britain. In particular, he fixed his gimlet eye on neoliberal capitalism and 'Victorian morality.' In both *Jubilee* and *Edward II*, Jarman challenges Thatcher's 'There is No Alternative' philosophy by wrestling time out of joint, compelling the viewer to examine the present through the imaginative prism of the past.

As a "radical traditionalist," Jarman was in the perfect position to criticize Thatcherism—an ideology hinged on the distortion of time. After all, Thatcher won on a platform of 19th-century economics, a centuries-old moral code, and a nostalgic heritage politics, all cloaked in the language of modernization. The disintegration of the linear timeline in *Jubilee* and *Edward II* serves to expose the plasticity of our histories, and to encourage us to critically re-examine our straight-washed national myths. In Jarman's films, the film strip itself becomes a site where collective memory and identity can be constructed and negotiated.

The temporal subversion in *Jubilee* takes the form of a dream allegory, a temporality described by Jarman as "the past dreamed the future present." Queen Elizabeth's and John Dee's search for knowledge acts as a framing device for a prophetic exploration of the near future.[102] The Virgin Queen, ambassador of a so-called 'Golden Age,' travels four centuries ahead, only to witness the crumbling conclusion of her empire.

In retrospect, many of *Jubilee*'s neoliberal prophecies came true in the end. Brixton and Toxteth did indeed go up in riotous flames in 1981, and Adam Ant (so green and fresh-faced as Kid) "was Top of the Pops and signed up with Margaret Thatcher to sing at the Falklands Ball."[103] Perhaps Borgia Ginz was right after all: "They all sign up one way or another." *Jubilee* endures as a striking foretelling of the years of deprivation and nihilism to come.

The temporal subversion in *Edward II*, on the other hand, can be best described as *transgressive kinship* — forming throughlines between queer lives and liberation struggles unfolding centuries apart. The anachronisms dotting the film serve to draw Marlowe's play into the present,

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[102] Peake, *Derek Jarman*, 246-247.
[103] Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, 164.

embedding the contemporary struggle of the queer community within the respectable form of a literary adaptation. Meanwhile, the King's son, Prince Edward III, serves as an emblem of continued survival, the undying possibility of the Queer Child.

These two films, released on either side of the Thatcher years, work in concert to criticize the violence and austerity of the late seventies and eighties, and to insist that there *must* be an alternative. The agents of a tyrannical police state (the 'Special Branch' in *Jubilee*, faceless riot police in *Edward II*) are represented as symptoms of a culture of suffocation, where repressed desires manifest themselves in the form of terror and brutality. Both films propose that nature—be it that which grows from the ground, or that which courses through one's veins—is the only chance at salvation we have left.

In Jarman's films, queerness expands well beyond the realms of sexuality or love. It shapes the very way that Jarman conceptualizes and represents time. His temporal tinkerings in both *Jubilee* and *Edward II* are reminiscent of José Esteban Muñoz's vision of queerness in *Cruising Utopia*. Muñoz declares that "QUEERNESS IS NOT yet here." He goes on to explain:

> We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future... Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle... we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing... Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.[104]

Muñoz's quote underscores the driving force behind Jarman's temporal subversion: queerness, the longing for something different, and the audacity to ask for more out of life than the limits of Heterosoc would allow. The linear timeline is only one way to conceptualize history, in the same way

[104] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

that chiaroscuro is merely one method among many of painting the human figure. In *Jubilee* and *Edward II*, Jarman uses motifs of time travel and interlinking histories to graft his own queer temporalities.

These temporalities, grounded in equal parts fierce anger and tender comradery, are fundamentally incompatible with the limiting concept of time (aka 'chrononormativity') mandated by Thatcherism. Its ideology does not leave room for deviance, or the interconnectedness of human beings. The neoliberal notion that "there is no such thing as society," that every individual is merely out for themselves, fabricates a deeply inhumane 'human nature,' rooted in competition and antagonism. By nature of the transgressive and transtemporal kinship built in *Edward II*, or the few glimmers of humanity pocking *Jubilee* (the characters of Viv, Sphinx and Angel; the crypts of a New Jerusalem), Jarman asserts that there *is* an alternative to the malaise and disconnectedness of capitalist realism.

Despite the pessimistic tone of many of his films, which paint the present and near future as dystopic hellscapes, they never sink into nihilism. For though the here and now may be a prison house, the bold beauty of queer time is the belief in a *then and there* — not nostalgia (a dangerous, regressive creature), but potentiality. It was Jarman's refusal to accept the purported inevitability of capitalist realism, or the repressive strictures of 'Victorian morality,' that rendered him an inextricable thorn in the side of the New Right.

There must be an alternative, the restless artist insists from the beyond. *There simply must be*.

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